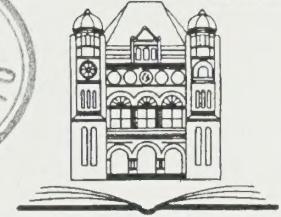


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NOTES

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S NEW MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Ted Glenn, Research Officer

INTRODUCTION

In September 1996, British Columbia Premier Glen Clark made history by creating Canada's first government department dedicated solely to serving children and families. The new Ministry will fund all child and family programmes formerly provided by the ministries of Social Services, Health, the Attorney General, Education and Women's Equality at current expenditure levels.

BACKGROUND

In 1994, B.C.'s Minister of Social Services announced that Justice Thomas Gove would lead an independent inquiry into the death of Matthew Vaudreuil, while in the care of the province's child protection system. After 18 months of investigation, Gove released a two-volume report and 118 detailed recommendations designed to improve B.C.'s child protection services, policies and practices.¹ One portion of these recommendations dealing with provincial responsibilities called for all provincial child welfare responsibilities and services to be brought together in a new Ministry for Children. Gove recommended that the new Ministry's main responsibilities include:

- policy development, including research and inter-ministerial coordination;
- design of province-wide child welfare services;
- training in all aspects of child welfare;
- quality assurance, including
 - setting province-wide child welfare and guardianship standards;
 - setting practice standards;
 - licensing all child welfare professionals and other providers; and
 - performing practice audits;
- financial management, including
 - funding child welfare authorities; and
 - performing financial audits;
- operations, including
 - coordinating with Regional Child Welfare Boards; and
 - managing provincial programmes such as youth containment centres.

Gove recommended that the new Ministry, in conjunction with 20 new Regional Child Welfare Boards, oversee the actual delivery of such child welfare services as child protection, family support, guardianship and adoption by community-based Children's Centres.

In December 1995, the government of British Columbia accepted Gove's report and established the Transition Commission for Child and Youth Services (also recommended by

¹ British Columbia, *The Report of the Gove Inquiry into Child Protection* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1995).

Gove) to implement its recommendations. The Commission was established as a temporary office of the Legislature and was given three years to fulfill its mandate.

THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Following the provincial election in May 1996, Premier Glen Clark asked the Transition Commissioner, Cynthia Morton, to accelerate the Commission's implementation timetable in light of numerous media reports of additional children dying while in the custody of the province's welfare system.² In September 1996, Clark announced a major restructuring of the province's child-welfare system, including the creation of a new Ministry of Children and Families. Programmes to be consolidated in the new Ministry include:

- from the Ministry of Social Services:
 - various family and children's services, including child protection, family support, guardianship and adoption;
 - community support services for children with mental disabilities, programmes for children with special needs, daycare subsidies; and
 - some income assistance services for families with children and for youth;
- from the Ministry of the Attorney General:
 - youth probation and related community justice services;
 - youth containment centres; and
 - family court counseling;

- from the Ministry of Education:
 - special needs educational services; and
 - school-based child and youth care workers;
- from the Ministry of Health:
 - alcohol and drug treatment services for children and youth;
 - public health nursing services relating to children and youth;
 - forensic psychiatric services related to children and youth;
 - child and youth mental health services; and
 - infant and child development programmes;
- from the Ministry of Women's Equality:
 - child care.

As recommended by Gove, the new Ministry, in conjunction with Regional Boards, will oversee the actual delivery of services by community-based Children's Centres.

Premier Clark appointed Penny Priddy, a long-time New Democrat MLA from Surrey-Newton and a former Minister of Labour and of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, as the Minister of the new department.

² Tom Barrett and Jim Beatty, "Sweeping reorganization of child-welfare services: Clark unveils new Ministry of Children," *Vancouver Sun*, 24 September 1996, p. A1. See, as well, Craig McInnes, "Child deaths spur bold B.C. overhaul," *Globe and Mail*, 24 September 1996, p. A8; and British Columbia, Transition Commission for Child and Youth Services, *Framework and Workplan* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1996).

